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INQUIRY

Topic: THE FUTURE

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, 37, heads a political forecasting company that predicted that Yuri Andropov would succeed Leonid Brezhnev as the leader of the Soviet Union. Bueno de Mesquita, a professor of political science and chairman of that department at the University of Rochester in New York, was interviewed by USA TODAY's Barbara Reynolds.



Bueno de Mesquita

Mideast war likely; Marines will remain

USA TODAY: What is your 1984 forecast for the Middle East?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: Unfortunately, I would anticipate a war between Israel and Syria. It will be a war that the Israelis will initiate in response to the intransigence of the Syrians, and their refusal to get out of Lebanon, and it will be a war that Israel will win. The purpose of the war, in my estimation, is that the Israelis want to get out of Lebanon. And for domestic political reasons, they seem to feel that they can't withdraw their troops without the Syrians withdrawing. They've paid a very heavy price to get their troops where they are.

USA TODAY: If there is a Mideast war, what do you think the United States will do?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: The United States is beginning to relax the pressure that we put on Israel to restrain their behavior, because the Syrians

have been permitting the imposition of heavy military costs on the United States. We will start to look the other way and give the Israelis a freer hand to force the Syrians out and ultimately I think they will. That will eventually lead to a negotiated settlement in Lebanon, although I see that as being several years away.

USA TODAY: Would the Soviet Union get involved if there were a Mideast war?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union negotiate with each other on the basis of what are essentially side issues, and a Syrian-Israeli war is for them not a center-stage issue. Intransigence on the part of the Soviets or on the part of the United States in negotiations are a consequence of strategic maneuvering. They are efforts to improve bargaining positions. I don't see that kind of war as having a lasting effect on U.S.-Soviet relations, but of course it will be harmful.

USA TODAY: So you don't see the Soviets joining the conflict?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: Not at all, beyond the 7,000 so-called technicians in the area who will assist the Syrians in training and preparing to fight. As things get hot, the Soviets will take up positions to the rear. They have a long history of being very reluctant to engage in combat in the Middle East. Except for Afghanistan, since the end of World War II Soviet troops have not engaged in combat anywhere, except against their own allies.

USA TODAY: Do you think the U.S. Marines will remain in Lebanon?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: I think the Marines will be bogged down in Lebanon. But I don't think that the Marines will be part of the fighting, other than on a very fringe defensive basis. The United States is going to let the Israelis do the fighting in the area, and we will take a background position — defend our position, defend the Gemayel government, and not get actively involved in the fighting.

USA TODAY: Have you made any forecasts about the United States?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: We don't do any forecasts

about the United States. The corporation has recently received a ruling from the Justice Department, that providing this sort of information about the United States would not be viewed as being an agent of a foreign power. We wouldn't have to register as a lobbyist. So we may start to do analysis on the United States.

USA TODAY: Why would the Justice Department say that you have to lobby as a foreign agent?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: If you advise another country on how to influence American policies, then you're an agent of a foreign power, and we don't want to be put in that position — that's not to say that we don't have foreign clients, but we don't give foreign clients information about how to influence American policy.

USA TODAY: Who are your foreign clients?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: The clients prefer to remain confidential. We don't discuss who, in particular, they are. They are some friendly governments.

USA TODAY: Can you elaborate at all?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: We have a variety of clients who are interested in how political change around the world will affect either national security or their business interests. And in the case of Yuri Andropov, it was a question of national security. The U.S. government wanted to have some insight into how Soviet policy was likely to change. So that was a forecast that was done for the federal government.

USA TODAY: For the CIA?

BUENO DE MESQUITA: We prefer not to get into who in particular in the federal government.

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